Precautions for Eating Wild Game Harvested with Lead Ammunition

Citizens have expressed concerns about the possible health effects of eating wild game taken with lead ammunition.

The Wyoming Department of Health believes that in general people should reduce their exposure to lead as much as possible. This is particularly important for children and pregnant women. Wyoming health officials believe there is some evidence that consuming wild game shot with lead ammunition may increase levels of lead in the blood. Therefore, individuals consuming wild game, especially children and pregnant women, should take steps to minimize their potential exposure to lead, and use their judgment about consuming game that was taken using lead-based ammunition.

The potential impact of lead exposure, even small amounts, can be harmful, especially to infants, young children and pregnant women. Symptoms of long-term exposure to lower lead levels may be less noticeable but are still serious. Anemia is common and damage to the nervous system may cause impaired mental function. Other symptoms are appetite loss, abdominal pain, constipation, fatigue, sleeplessness, irritability and headache.

Lead exposure is most serious for young children because they absorb lead more easily than adults and are more susceptible to its harmful effects. Even low-level exposure may harm the intellectual development, behavior, size and hearing of infants. During pregnancy, especially in the last trimester, lead can cross the placenta and affect the unborn child.

If you are concerned about lead exposure, your doctor can conduct a simple blood test to measure your blood lead level.

Some ways that hunters and others who consume wild game can reduce their potential exposure to lead are:

- Consider alternative expanding non-lead ammunition such as copper or other high weight-retention bullets, such as bonded bullets.
- Practice marksmanship and hunting skills to get closer to game and to make cleaner, lethal shots away from major muscle areas. Aim for the neck, head or the vitals behind the shoulder. Don't shoot at running game.
- Take care in reloading shells and wash hands after handling ammunition.
- Avoid consuming internal organs, as they can contain extra lead from heart-lung shots.
- If you process your own game, always trim a generous distance away from the wound channel and discard any meat that is bruised, discolored or contains hair, dirt, bone fragments or grass.
- Remind your meat processor not to use game with excessive shot damage.